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The 2030 Agenda as Blueprint for a Post-COVID World

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The pandemic is exposing weaknesses, and strengths, within our societies, government structures, and systems, calling for critical reflection to map our way forward.
- The best celebration of the fifth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda will be to place it at the center of efforts to design sustainable solutions and build back better.

By Pytrik Dieuwke Oosterhof

As the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to unfold, differentiated effects are becoming clear. Even though we do not yet know how the pandemic will play out over the coming year(s), it is clear that it is much more than a health crisis. Its impacts and complexities are multi-dimensional, and present wide-ranging social, economic, and environmental challenges for countries and communities in all corners of the world. The pandemic is exposing weaknesses, as well as strengths, within our societies, government structures, and systems, calling for critical reflection to map our way forward.

The 193 countries that adopted the 2030 Agenda on 25 September 2015 did not anticipate the acute need that the global community now has for a shared framework through which to address multiple challenges simultaneously and in all corners of the globe.

SDGS

1. NO POVERTY

17. PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

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As we mark the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the best celebration of this landmark agreement will be to place it at the center of efforts to design sustainable solutions and build back better. The 2030 Agenda provides the blueprint we need, and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identify ways in which the global community can collaborate to achieve the interconnected social, economic, and environmental challenges we now face.

We are not starting from a strong place, however. The SDG Summit in September 2019 called progress to date insufficient, and analyses pointed to stagnation in efforts to address SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities).[1] The COVID-19 pandemic has added further challenges for making progress on the SDGs. Poverty, hunger, and inequalities have increased around the world. Economic growth has also moved in reverse. During the July 2020 session of the UN High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), UN Secretary-General António Guterres told the international community that COVID-19 could set us back years and even decades, leaving countries with massive fiscal and growth challenges at a time when a "leap ahead" is desperately needed.[2] He also stated that, had implementation of the 2030 Agenda been further advanced, the world would have been more resilient and better prepared to respond to the challenges posed by the global health emergency.[3]

As speakers during the first SDG Moment highlighted, our post-pandemic recovery efforts must take on the added objective of building back better.[4] The interconnected crises have impacts on all sectors, and have uncovered complex interconnections within our societies. The SDGs acknowledge interdependencies among multiple sectors. An effective response to COVID-19 needs to be coordinated and multi-dimensional, reflecting the relevance of the SDGs in building sustainable and resilient societies. Voluntary National Review (VNR) reporting indicates that many countries have begun mainstreaming the SDGs into their policy planning, but it is critical to keep the momentum moving towards this systems approach to development.[5]

Governance systems that are guided by a whole-of-society approach and adopt inclusive, participatory, and partnership decision-making processes are needed to respond effectively. Only a holistic response that is based on cross-sectoral collaboration at all levels of society can build adaptive capacity to respond to the immediate and long-term effects of COVID-19. Multi-stakeholder collaboration, including with the scientific community, civil society, and the private sector at national and local levels is essential. Local governments are on the frontlines of responding to the pandemic, and their capacity to enable an effective response to, and recovery from, COVID will be essential. Efforts to localize the SDGs are therefore more relevant than ever.

The effects of the health and economic crises also highlight the significance of the 2030 Agenda's principle to 'leave no one behind.' Rising inequalities and the disproportionate impact on groups such as older persons, women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, and informal workers call for a people-centered, inclusive, and human rights based approach to the COVID-19 recovery. Promoting universal access to health care and services and social protection, as well as ensuring the protection of human rights and well-being of all, will be fundamental measures to build back a better, more equitable and just world.

The 193 countries that adopted the 2030 Agenda on 25 September 2015 did not anticipate the acute need that the global community now has for a shared framework through which to address multiple challenges simultaneously and in all corners of the globe. Aligning COVID-19 response and recovery efforts with the SDGs can help to address today's challenges while also building more inclusive economies within sustainable and resilient societies. This requires considerable commitment and solidarity across and at all levels of society, and adopting the 2030 Agenda as a blueprint for recovery.

This article was authored by Pytrik Dieuwke Oosterhof, Sustainable Development Expert at O-Land Consulting.

[1] 'Report of the Secretary General on SDG progress 2019 – Special Edition', United Nations, 2019

[2] Opening Statement of UN Secretary-General, António Guterres at the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development, 14 July 2020.

[3] Press release, 'Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, UN High-level Forum aims to chart pathways toward a sustainable recovery', United Nations, 3 July 2020.

[4] 'Summary of the Sustainable Development Goals Moment', Earth Negotiations Bulletin Volume 33, Number 66, 21 September 2020.

[5] 'P4R Comparative Analysis of the Voluntary National Reviews', GIZ, 2019.

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